

SOMEWHERE, CAGED UPON SOME ISLAND OF THE DAMNED,
LEPERS ARE HAVING MORE FUN THAN I AM TONIGHT

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, I'm a pariah.
No one wants to know me
my books don't sell
all my friends leave town
the hecklers start in on me.

Everyone seems to have it out for me
every bullet has my number on it
I'm a marked man, a Jonah.

I enter my favorite bookstore.
Four muscle-bound punks come in;
they eye me for a mugging.

I drop by my favorite bar
for a quiet beer and some peaceful melancholia.
I swear the bartender groans.
All the regulars get up and leave.
A lady tells the bouncer
"I don't like that s.o.b. against the wall
he smokes too much and says nothing."

It's as if everyone got together and talked it over
and decided that I'm an asshole.
It's going to be a long summer.

THE RATE OF ATTRITION

The job soured on me.
I went into high stress. I
developed a tick in my left eye
that lasted from August through November.
In December at a conference
I stayed out all night drunk in the rain
and ruined my new tan suit.
Dry cleaning wouldn't remove all the wrinkles.

But the crash came in April
at Otter Crest on the coast when,
after three days and nights of drinking and
smoking and no sleep and bad company,
I had such pains in my chest
I thought I was dying.

Then I went crazy for a little while.
Since then I have gotten a tan
and mowed the lawn five times,
sold both cars,

shampooed the dining room carpet,
bought a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon
and this pack of unfiltered Chesterfields.
Then I saw a rat in the lobby of the Jester.
The lawn mower ran out of gasoline.
And sometimes I sit in Boone's Tavern.
And sometimes I sit in the Ram.
Then I put the house up for sale
and had eggs sunny-side-up for breakfast.
The rate of attrition continues
unabated.

SALVATION

I have a bad righthand turn signal
and therefore hate to drive at night
for fear I'll be pulled over
and I wasn't feeling so well anyway
as a matter of fact
I was gagging
the swollen gland in my neck was back
and I had a bad cough
and a runny nose
and genuinely felt like I was dying
but I needed to get out for the evening
so I drove over to my favorite bar
in Belmont Shore, careful to make only
left turns as much as possible
all the way over from Lakewood
so as to avoid arrest for one more night
the place was full of creeps
and the beer tasted like piss
a man pulled out a handgun
and shot the man sitting next to me
dead off his stool
I got up and left.
The streets were full of the bodies
of dead joggers. I found my car
and drove home slowly
weaving in and out of the twisted
smoldering heaps
of wrecked police cars. Making nothing
but right turns. Got home, fixed a sandwich
and watched some funny television shows
washing it all down with a can of TAB.
which was so choke full of caffeine
I slept like a baby all night long
awaking the next morning
cheerful and in perfect health.